

“Ecohuman Flourishing and the Evolution of Consciousness”

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Abstract

This essay develops interrelations and mutual implications foremost among Bernie Sanders’ book *Our Revolution: A Future to Believe In*, Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si’: On Care for our Common Home*, and David Fideler’s *Restoring the Soul of the World: Our Living Bond with Nature’s Intelligence*. It proposes that the evolution of contemplative, non-utilitarian or non-calculative attentiveness allows experience of ourselves as participants in and as modes of self-aware cosmogenesis – as what Thomas Berry calls a dimensionality of Earth. Our emerging contemplative ecology participates in *creatio continua* as Earth’s autotelic mindfulness.

Introduction

This discussion will develop interrelations foremost among three pieces of writing, but it won’t be limited to these. The three are: Bernie Sanders’ book titled *Our Revolution: A Future to Believe In*, published in 2016; Pope Francis’ encyclical titled *Laudato Si’: On Care for our Common Home*, published in 2015; and David Fideler’s book *Restoring the Soul of the World: Our Living Bond with Nature’s Intelligence*, 2014¹.

These recent works have different yet interwoven purposes. Sanders’ can be considered political, the Pope’s religious or even ecospiritual, and Fideler’s work is a scholarly exercise in

the history and future evolution of consciousness with the aim of helping us move beyond the idea of sustainability alone to the idea and practice of ecohuman regeneration -- of planetary ecological and ecosocial regeneration for future generations (251). Together, they help midwife among us a story and practice of ecohuman flourishing for the extreme long-term future and in doing so illustrate a form of consciousness evolution in our time.

I use the word ecohuman to suggest that humans are participants in the evolution of future life on Earth, and that we are by analogy the ecology of Earth becoming self-aware and intentional in the evolutionary process. By flourishing I connote more than the kind of sustainability mentality that gives us greener ways to make, run and to wash cars and instead connote natural, continual, cogrowthfully bountiful Earth-human fruitfulness.

And I should add that when I speak of consciousness evolution I don't mean a narrowly linear growth or cumulative expansion of our usual mental-rational concepts-based structure of consciousness -- one which in fact conceives things, including consciousness itself, from a linear perspectival, dualizing, and control-based point of view. I mean instead something more like what Jean Gebser speaks of as an integral awareness that is holistic -- one which in rendering different kinds of experience as well as different kinds of consciousness transparent to one another renders ourselves transparent or aperspectival to and with cosmogenesis -- and by which we experience ourselves as modes, dimensionalities and embodiments of Earth-life, not just subjective inhabitants on the one hand or egocentric manipulators and consumers of its externalized objectivity on the other.

Writes Gebser in a way that is useful shorthand for our present conversation: “The new attitude will be consolidated only when the individual can gradually begin to disregard hi[r] ego. As long as our thinking is exclusively self-centered the world will remain fragmented....What is necessary is neither egoism nor egolessness....not an ego-cide but an overcoming of ego.... [i. e.] freedom from the ‘I’ is the characteristic of the integral consciousness structure” (532). In this sense, the evolution of a sustaining consciousness may be interpreted as a contemplative getting-out-of-our-own-way, of forgoing ego and thereby of stamping less of a narcissistic, anthropocentric footprint on the ecosystems of EarthHuman and biocosmic interbeing. EcoHuman flourishing may well be allowed and enabled by contemplative practice and disposition in experiencing “our living bond with nature’s intelligence” as we make ourselves transparent to the life of all things. The ego that inaugurated the Anthropocene age is not a sufficient or an entirely necessary condition of meaningful, fruitful life coevolution in the future.

The systems of the Earth and, for that matter, of the universe – of what Thomas Berry emphasizes is cosmogenesis – are interconnected. We don’t find any life and consciousness apart from all the other dynamics and systems of ongoing creation, organic, physical, chemical, etc. It takes the interplay all of them together to make the universe go. So when life does show up, it is in its way an emergent property of, and at the same time a participating influence in, the further coevolution of Earth systems and, by extension, of (anthropo)cosmic evolution – *creatio continua*.

Because of interconnectivities expressed as diversely as those in quantum vacuum and in field physics, theory of the implicate order, in big bang and singular universe cosmology, in

evolutionary theory, in the self-organizing dynamics of systems theory, or in archetypal psychology, we may infer that when consciousness does appear in the overall affair of existence, it is not simply a matter of late-arrival individual human-ego-awareness but presumably has origins long before that in becoming a dimensionality, as Thomas Berry puts it, of the overall evolution of the universe. (Correlatively, argue Chopra and Kafatos, “you are the universe.”) Moreover, given indigenous traditions worldwide and the teachings of such traditions as *Huayan* and *Dzogchen* Buddhism, Hindu *advaita* and Eastern Christian notions of hypostatic union, the extent of consciousness appears in(de)terminate.

Terrence Deacon uses the spelling *ententional* rather than *intentional* to highlight that our meanings, values, purposes, thoughts, feelings, etc. have their origins in the all-together unfolding of the potentials of cosmogenesis expressed in humans and as humans, and these don't just show up between the ears of early primates ~50 millions of years ago but begin taking expression long before that. This is not to say that earliest life forms like bacteria are conscious as we use the term or that human awareness is the aim of coevolutionary processes but that consciousness when it does appear to itself in and as self-reflexive and self-organizing systems has its antecedents long before in the far depths of ever-present origin. For that matter, that bacteria have no consciousness of the kind we attribute to ourselves does not mean that theirs and ours (if I may rhetorically reify and essentialize here) are not on a continuum having a shared origin and ongoing noetic ecology of some kind. Our outsized and arrogant anthropocentrism with respect to the natural environment, as if it were an object outside us to be manipulated by and for us, is a late and self-centeredly contracted form of the emergence of life and consciousness that is universe- or cosmogenesis-wide and -

interdependent. It may now be time for us to let go of the ego preoccupations that stunt, eclipse and prevent our experiences of harmony with nature's self-organizing intelligence in what Gregory Bateson speaks of as the necessary unity of mind and nature.

So a first question to ask about the evolution of consciousness is: Whose consciousness, *Kemosabe*? It is beginning to look like the life-and-mind in question is distributed in various phases or modes throughout the universe process. Or to put it another way, no part of our life or self, physical, organic, mental, emotional or spiritual, is not interconnected with previous and with presently widespread and emergent universe dynamics. Nothing shows up alone. It takes a universe. We do not just inhabit, we instantiate, perform and manifest while we participate the life of the universe, of nature. We also in our contemplation of and as a mode of this contextualize and autotelically instantiate anthropocosmic development.

Bernie, Francis and Fideler in different ways have relevant things to say about all this. To a large degree, their common theme is hinted in Fideler's subtitle: *Our Living Bond with Nature's Intelligence*. Some of these things may be interesting, helpful and illuminating for us. On the way to engaging with them, let's take a brief look at the history of consciousness that has made their ideas today seem fruitful, necessary and inescapably relevant.

In the West, for Plato and many before him, the world was made of organisms and was itself a single vast all-including life or organism. In later chapters of our history, the commodification of others as slaves and even of ourselves (our talents and skills) in the name of property, advancement, profit and power arose with the commodification and gradual degradation of nature, and many kinds of life and culture. With the rise of early science, the

objectification, division and quantification of the mechanistic worldview of parts external to one another all bumping along in the void gave us leave to think of nature and its organisms as something to be vexed, tortured and controlled with the tools of reason and experimentation, as Francis Bacon liked to put it. Dualistic division of experience was everywhere, taught Descartes: God v. humanity, God v. nature, mind v. body. And dualism along with the view of nature as machinery with replaceable parts further legitimized our distance from and our control over nature and other kinds, castes or classes of persons. With the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism as explained by Max Weber – and with the related religious doctrine of the elect that some persons were chosen even before creation itself to be saved and that the sign of this blessing was their material prosperity -- the mentality and goal of material success and domination became the proof of grace (of good, of right, etc.).

A Word on Wording

But there is a catch, a context, and maybe a paradox in all this. We (think we) can tell ourselves all this, or tell and know anything else, foremost with stories (aka theses, arguments, scriptures etc.). And in the Universe Story today, as related by such thinkers as Berry, Swimme, Tucker and many others the narrative by which we know and understand cosmic and human coevolution is also the self-telling and the self-knowing and the self-orienting (via its emergent values and meanings) of undivided cosmogenesis – the everywhere-ongoing that is as much knit into each of us as we also are continuously interacting with and in increasing ways influencing it, e. g., our technologies and values. Earth and Cosmos are in this sense a larger kind of interbeing, anthropocosmogenesis; we are microcosms in and of the event. But shared meaning, in language, art and otherwise is the foremost way we know, experience, and relate

our truth and our understanding of this or anything. There appears to be no art, symbol, or narrative-independent truth/meaning. There is of course non-languaged experience, feeling-value and action, but any after-the-fact characterization of this is itself connected with some kind of shared communication in language, ritual, etc.

Shared language and narrative may not always have the primacy attributed by Maxine Sheets-Johnstone to physical movement, yet they nevertheless afford the shared rhythms, empathies and ontohermeneutic dynamics of dance and ritual. Authentic and meaningful story, myth and consciousness – including philosophical and scientific – can express and engender resonance among bodies, minds and the processes of cosmogenesis. Again, as for Thomas Berry, in the universe story we tell (in its self-telling through us) we can experience ourselves as a dimensionality of the Earth, and as an emergent of its patterns of change and growth .

Given the “design for consciousness” neurophenomenology described by Chris Mare, we could even say the cognitive/conceptual and narratistic consciousness is an objectifying representation and/or a derivative algorithm of the kinaesthetic mode. We can speak of the poetics of anthropocosmopoiesis, keeping in mind its congruence with and performance as the *ritmos*, rhythm, pace, cadence rhyme and metric in the music of movement and/as anthropocosmogenesis. We begin to see nondualizingly that cosmogenesis is irreducibly anthropocosmogenesis, and in that sense it is continuously creative, a *creatio continua*. This continuing creation and recreation of cosmos is perfused and enveloped as much on Earth by the emergent values and meanings of self-organizing systems like human beings as we are simultaneously enveloped and penetrated by the supposed constants and ratios of nature, of *natura naturans*. Where there is cosmos there is emergent heart/mind (or *xin* in NeoConfucian

tradition) in the same way heart/mind, axiology, is irreducibly a vital agent in the reflection of cosmos on itself by/as an inquiring and celebrating humanity (cf. Slater).

At the same time, it seems, if we use objectifying words, narratives, theories for our experience we thereby re-present that experience and thus distance ourselves from it. Plus, we need ever larger nimbi and matrices of wording to verify, clarify and critique what we have worded. In this way, although it is an ongoing process our mental/rational consciousness seeks to stabilize experience in our terms (cf. Gödel). But nondualized and nondualizing experience-as-such, as Guenther speaks of it, with and particularly without words and language, (or in language spontaneously and authentically bespeaking/en-chanting experience) is not divided or dividing subject/object. It emerges in complete attentiveness uncluttered by ego aims to control or predict. And we may conceive it to be autotelically celebratory or self-celebratory even in the way of awakening or enlightenment. In this case, thematizing and objectivizing ego-consciousness is obscuration despite our default credence in it as reliable (re)presentation or, over time, as civilization (Guenther, 3, 100, 240; Csikzentmihalyi).

Any truth or reality we know and tell is knit with and in our ways of knowing, telling, contextualizing; and these are interactive with, are modes and dimensionalities of, the overall coevolution of cosmos, Earth, life and mind. Our thoughts and observations, as we've learned from 20th and 21st century physicists like Bohr, Heisenberg, Kafatos, Pauli, and Schrödinger (not to say earlier Romantic poets and natural philosophers like Wordsworth, Blake and Schelling) are part of what we behold and engage. Our stories shape our researches, findings, outlooks and expectations. As we story so do we (co)universe.

And as with Gödel's theorem, we have no formal way of storying to relate, explain and share our experience that is going to be simultaneously true and complete or consistent, i. e., veracity, completeness and consistency interdepend with theses or themes that are not-yet-existent or are outside of the current story. These are effectively story-invisible until made a part of, if not a condition for, the storying. But to do this another story must be told; the earlier story must be enlarged or contextualized or relativized by it; there is no limit and there is no formal rule or algorithm for this *creatio continua*. We may say the pattern that connects is a meta-pattern along the lines of Gregory Bateson in *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity*. It is a self-making existential and poetic art (in the sense that poetry is *poiesis* or making); cosmology is aesthetic as some scholars of Chinese lore like Roger Ames say. And in NeoConfucian terms, a mature, sagely cosmology is the participation of Heaven, Earth and Humanity, *tianrenheyi* whose path, murmur the Daoists, is laid down in walking.

When, for instance, in the *Bible* we hear that In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God, we might do well to think of the literalism that might be associated with that. In the beginning, *Bereshit* was the word; the word, the speaking was also the act of the beginning of creation; and it was both story-telling and spoken *fiat* or letting-there-be of creation, participation and instantiation of ongoing-creating. Our narration of creating and God's speech-act of creating, *poiesis*, are indivisible in this hermeneutic which also is a mode of the ongoing *creatio continua* or ever-present origin. The act of continuous creating and our continuous forms of poetry and narration are indivisible emergents, modes and contexts of ongoing cosmogenesis in our lives. It abides as our storying; our storying affects how it unfolds (certainly in how we study and treat Earth and other natural systems and

persons). Our storying effects cosmogenesis in symbolic and in literal senses, for without story is no comprehensive sense of life meaning in the future evolution of interbeing, not to say of politics, research and experimentation. And our thoughtfulness performs the dance of the everywhere-ongoing.

In our ways of thinking lies axio-cosmo-genesis, a logos of cocreating as (or identifiable with) the logos of initial (e. g. Big Bang) and ongoing creativity as and in stories, values and meanings, as scientific and philosophical or ethical theories and also as what Spinoza called *natura naturans*, nature naturing -- and not just nature as an inert, external, fixed and terminal product or resource but as a form or kind of our own interbeing: a dimensionality of ourselves as we are in turn a dimensionality of the universe in this telling. In still other terms as used by the systems theorist Erich Jantsch, it might be better to think of God not as an external something prior to the universe but as the continually emerging mind of the universe of everywhere interconnected and compenetrating cosmogenesis or cosmopoiesis that is embodied in and includes ourselves as we simultaneously enact, contextualize and participate/influence it.

It may be that the songs, stories and theories we sing of God, natural creation and an evolving universe are not just about these or artefacts of these but are coconstituents and instantiations of these. Nor are these necessarily dualistically severable from one another or from ourselves or from the storying that codes them in this story of a universe coming to self-aware axiogenesis or value and intention creation and performance. In such a tale, poetics, poiesis, ecopoiesis and cosmopoiesis are interconnected, covariant and covalent.

Not only is our natural language an emergent and bloom of the interrelated biocultural movements, patterns and rhythms of Earthcosmos, but so are the emergent meanings, values, intuitions, hopes and beliefs we share simultaneously rhizomes, seeds, flowers and fruits in the growing garden of interbeing and also its interpretive trail-blazing, interpretations, conceptualizations and orienting-pathmaking. The path makes itself as our EarthHuman song singing.

“Our Revolution”

Bernie Sanders is not an ideologue. The bases and the merits of his ideas or policies are dialogical, educational and generally inclusive. But there is a refrain in his work *Our Revolution* that might surprise anyone tuned foremost only to sound bites from his overall vision. In short, it is this, “The bottom line is that everything is connected to everything” (333). And he means not just health care, good jobs, education, and so on but also “global climate change. . .the single greatest threat facing the planet” (355). And although his focus is American politics, Sanders is attentive to the same deep connectivity found by science not only between natural systems, but between natural systems and human survival and between our treatment of nature and our moral or ethical outlooks with regard to Earth-human wellbeing.

Interestingly, in documenting the degree to which climate change is caused by dominant human interest and mentality, Sanders quotes Pope Francis (as he does on other topics in his book) who has said, “the world is on a suicidal course with regard to climate change” (par. 361). Taking the bull by the horns, the senator declares: “One of the more profound lessons that I’ve learned in politics is that everything is related to everything else. Nothing exists in a vacuum.

There is no clearer example of that than our failure to boldly address the crisis of climate change and how that relates to a corrupt political and campaign finance system” (362). Sanders also highlights -- as we’ll hear the Pope saying later when in turn he speaks of “integral ecology” in his 2015 encyclical -- that the effects of global warming disproportionately affect the poor, whose communities are least prepared to deal with climate shocks, and who are typically left behind in the clean energy revolution (par. 372-373). Highlighting the standard mentality and practices conducive to corrupt neglect of the needs of the unprivileged classes, and how “no one seems to notice or care,” Sanders yet another time invokes Pope Francis who in turn pointedly asks: “How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points?” (par. 409).

Everything is connected to everything.

Set in another context, the fact of this does indeed yield the value, in Sanders’ words, that “A truly great nation is one that is filled with compassion and solidarity” (404). This describes the value dimension and the ecohumane performance of the interconnectivity premise. And when Bernie Sanders also writes that: “A great nation is judged not by how many millionaires and billionaires it has, or by the size of its military budget. It is not judged by the greed of its largest corporations. It is judged by how well it treats its weakest and most vulnerable citizens,” I will add that his words suggest too that how we treat the natural systems on which we depend and with which we participate, wittingly and unwittingly, underscores and reveals not only connectivity but additionally the degree to which for want of understanding and of actually practicing connectivity the modern nation-state delegitimizes and deracinates its own existence notably through the anthropo-ego-centric and larcenously greedy attitudes,

indifferences, calculations and manipulations of its dominant econocratic citizens. Sanders concludes, “As a nation, our priorities have become horribly distorted. Congress listens to the lobbyists from wealthy and powerful corporate interests, and ignores the pain of children who are hungry and homeless” (407). I presume he knows what he’s talking about; research indicates he’s held elected office some 36 years².

On Care for our Common Home

It is surprising, especially at this rather late date in our environmental understanding, how after in early paragraphs of his encyclical subtitled “On Care for our Common Home,” where he points to how the violence in ourselves as related to the sickness of the soil, water, Earth and air around us and to how our technocratic tendencies to exploitation of the Earth are covalent with the destruction of human and other populations, Pope Francis also needs to assert, and to repeat throughout, that “everything in the world is connected” and that because this is so we need a new lifestyle (para. 16, 111). The Universal Ordinary (one of his titles) makes no bones about saying too that “the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures” (para. 68). And he infers from our presently unhealthful and antienvironmental tendencies amid the increasingly evident Earth-human connectedness that it is time for a conversion to an integral ecology, and to a new order of communion and a redress of the specialization, degradation, fragmentation, reductionism, anxiety, and loss of purpose of life that are the consequence of a no longer ethical³ technocratic and econocratic anthropocentrism whose mentality and practice simultaneously mask and destroy the interconnectedness of all things in the name of profit (par. 5, 92, 110, 111, 137, 216).

Integral ecology (par. 137) is Francis' coding for: "openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology.... much more than intellectual appreciation or economic calculus" (par. 11); "an...ecology, which by definition does not exclude human beings, needs to take account of the value of labour.... Labourers and craftsmen [who] thus 'maintain the fabric of the world,'" (par. 124); "An integral ecology includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us, whose presence 'must not be contrived but found, uncovered,'" (par. 225); "We are speaking of an attitude of the heart, one which approaches life with serene attentiveness, which is capable of being fully present to someone [and to Earth] without thinking of what comes next, which accepts each moment as a gift....invited...to contemplate the lilies of the field and the birds of the air....completely present to everyone and to everything, and in this way...overcom[ing] that unhealthy anxiety which makes us superficial, aggressive and compulsive consumers" (par. 226).

Not inattentive to the precautionary principle (par. 186) or the issues of the limits to growth (par. 193) and to the *Earth Charter* (par. 207), Francis invites a step beyond these and related initiatives to the further understanding of an ethical ecology that: "We are always capable of going out of ourselves towards the other. Unless we do this, other creatures will not be recognized for their true worth; we are unconcerned about caring for things for the sake of others; we fail to set limits on ourselves in order to avoid the suffering of others or the deterioration of our surroundings. Disinterested concern for others, and the rejection of every form of self-centeredness and self-absorption, are essential if we truly wish to care for our brothers and sisters and for the natural environment. These attitudes also attune us to the

moral imperative of assessing the impact of our every action and personal decision on the world around us. If we can overcome individualism, we will truly be able to develop a different lifestyle and bring about significant changes in society” (par. 208).

Everything is interconnected, physically, organically and, we now see, eco-ethically. And to the extent this is so, it is time, as heralded thus far by Bernie and the Pope, for what Thomas Berry has called in his book *The Dream of the Earth*, “reinventing the human.” (82). Education for this, proposes the Pope, aims at creating “ecological citizenship” (par. 211), the relation between whose contemplative, aesthetic and narratistic dimensions and the maintenance of a healthy environment cannot be overlooked (par. 215), in an “ecological crisis [that is] also a summons to a profound interior conversion” (par. 217) and an “ecological conversion....to bring about a lasting change that is also a community conversion” (par. 218, 219), “capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption” (par. 222). The flourishing of EcoHuman relations in this rhapsody begins to sound like it is generated with a contemplative attentiveness to (and as a mode of) the systems and dynamics of our Earth in an ecohumanism or ecospirituality for their own sake and not for their external dollar-measured ego-reward payoff.

Together Bernie and Francis evidence that Our Revolution is connected with and expressed as Care for Our Common Home and vice versa. And a germane basis for each is expressed in the correlated views on higher education (which we may now think of as including mature, sagely and contemplative education as a means and condition of future ecohuman flourishing) expressed in: Francis’ idea of contemplative ecology, Sander’s proposed College for All Act (348), Berry’s chapter on The American College in the Ecological Age, and Fideler’s

discussion in his chapter “The Alchemy of Engagement” on “cultivating nature and the restoration of paradise” (254-55) in the planetary teaching, design and construction, for example, of bioshelter dwellings that are designed in collaboration with living systems and organisms to handle specific needs, like turning sewage into drinkable water or removing pollution from lakes (240-41).

And our revolution in caring for our common home has an unexpected form and value, if we allow it, yet one founded in archaic humanity: it is “the value of relaxation and festivity....receptivity and gratuity, which is quite different from mere inactivity,” continues Francis. “Rather, [he elaborates] it is another way of working, which forms part of our very essence. It protects human action from becoming empty activism; it also prevents that unfettered greed and sense of isolation which makes us seek personal gain to the detriment of all else” (par. 237).

Bernie for his part in challenging the political power of the oligarchy and its hegemonic “ownership of media, think tanks, university chairs, and political front groups...influenc[ing] American public opinion and domestic and foreign policy in ways that few realize” tacitly makes the same point. For to the extent our institutions educate and orient us toward a profit, ego-advancement and monetarily based work and prosperity ethic with, additionally, overtones of self- and class aggrandizement through perpetual obeisance at the altars of lucre and accumulation, we are machined and drilled and held hostage by work and other activity for gain. We are raised and trained and even commodified to do things that will pay off in units, like money, that are external to the activities themselves. And so we are always looking at the events and things of the world around us foremost in terms of their payoff value.

The idea of doing something just for itself, for fun, for – and as an expression of -- the celebration of life and interbeing itself, with no payoff other than the experience itself, wanes, and is obscured by the profitable Disneyworld distractions of recreation at the price of admission. We have lost the sense of interhuman play and its intrinsic reward, much as we lose the sustaining contemplative recreation of, with, and as nature, an extended version of our own life, in seeing it – geology, terrains, plants and animals --foremost as an external body of matter to be unrestorably manipulated to profitable use.

Between Bernie, Francis and Fldeler (who writes of the garden-paradise of Earth as an option and not merely a metaphor) on the overt and the tacit value of play, celebration and a nonutilitarian or noninstrumental consciousness, we have a renewed derivation of the ancient etymology of the term liturgy as the work of the people, as a kind of public works project. And its autotelic value is signaled as diversely as in: Barbara Ehrenreich's *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy*, Victor Turner's *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, James C. Scott's *Two Cheers for Anarchism: Six Easy Pieces on Autonomy, Dignity, and Meaningful Work and Play*, Wu Kuang-ming's *Chuang Tzu: World Philosopher at Play*, Josef Pieper's *Leisure the Basis of Culture*, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Philip Slater's *The Chrysalis Effect: The Metamorphosis of Global Culture* and Stuart Brown's *Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul*.

Nor is it all just a matter of play and games. From other, including scientific perspectives, the fun is more deeply baked-in. It's not as if play and fest are just byproducts of a mechanical universe, of natural selection, or merely ornamental distractions of humans from the massive and mindless determinisms of a tooth and claw evolutionary process. There is no such any

more. The paradigm of Constant Mechanism has yielded to one of processual, self-organizational, field and probabilistic interpretations.

There is reason to think, for example, that some supposed constants of cosmogenesis (e.g., sizes, rates, ratios, densities, etc.) change over time. On top of that, researchers like Stuart Kauffman reason in *Humanity in a Creative Universe* that the evolution of organophysical systems is creatively “beyond law” (xv) and proceeds less by their being mechanically caused to change. It now looks, judging from “The Foundations” chapter of Kauffman and continuing, more like the deterministic Newtonian model of billiard balls following in lock-step order the exact geometrical lineage dictated by the angular momentum of $f=ma$ from a specific space-time vector, as if certain Xs were pushing against various Ys, is superseded by the idea of an actuality being allowed to disclose or creatively transform into a new actuality in interacting with an environment of unprestatable and even nonlocalizable potentials that have no ascertainable reality until the time of their activation or engagement. In other words, the form of evolutionary deployment or outcome is not causally entailed or regulated by a quantifiable, predictable, determining rule or univocally objectifiable past condition from behind, from the prior condition, so much as it is enabled, allowed, disclosed or even evoked in creative ways that are impossible to prestate or predict – are not altogether rule-bound or entailed by any prior state. To this Deacon adds in *Incomplete Nature* the argument that it is exactly because of what is not there in a given evolving or self-organizing system or context that new potentials can be enacted. In other words, and he uses an ancient Chinese Daoist analogue, it is the empty, supposedly useless space in the hub of a wheel (where the axle fits) that gives it its value. Correlatively, the axle or “pivot of the *Dao*,” *dao shu*, is an analogue in Daoist lore for

the sage who embodies and moves in unity, flourishing accord and harmony with the rhythms and processes of Heaven and Earth.

This is the use of the useless, or *wu wei* in evolutionary systems theory as much as in Daoist tradition and in the experience of nonutilitarian interaction for its own sake, for intrinsic reward. The self-rewarding nature of Play (typified by what Csikzentmihalyi calls flow) may be far more true to the creative evolutionary process and the spirit of flourishingly sustaining anthropocosmogenesis than are dutiful bottom line mission and cause-effect goal accomplishment for gain. And how we sing this midwives the flourishing conduct of ourselves as its embodied dimensionality.

Here play the lilies of the field and the ravens of the air in the dance of *Shiva* and in *Lila*, the Sanskrit “play” of interaction between the unconditioned and the conditioned or contingent modes of existence. The inescapably coevolutionary development of co-flourishing and restorative phenomena of all kinds seems to be more like open-ended, autopoietic and self-rewarding playfulness than the predictable and monovalent outcomes of determined cause/effect (and monothetic ROI) aims and actions. Future events and states are allowed, enabled, or evoked, rather than entailed, pushed or shoved into being; and mind emerges in the freedom of the dance of now with what is not-yet, not at all typical of the iron clockwork determinism of world and self we’ve been so long indoctrinated with since Descartes, Bacon and the ensuing trumpery of P.T. Barnum, say, on manipulative self-promotion.

Somewhat ironically, the explorer-savant Alexander von Humboldt in the early 1800s had seen the destructive effects of excessive human manipulations of nature along mechanical

lines and the related mentality of gain; though even earlier in the West, monks and sages like Bernard of Clairvaux, Francis of Assisi and others had realized that the sustaining boon and the center of life was in *skhole*, the Greek word for contemplative leisure and the origin of the English word school. Wary of Francis Bacon's declaration that "the world is made for man" (Wulf, 67) and of Descartes' corresponding notions like the one that animals were no more than automata and thus inferior to humans who were "the lords and possessors of nature" (idem), Humboldt, a genuinely Romantic scientist, affirmed in 1803 (year of the Louisiana Purchase) that "Everything is interaction and reciprocal" and that a genuine regard for this must shape our interactions with nature else the results would be catastrophic (Wulf, 68)

Restoring the Earth-Human Soul

Early in David Fideler's book *Restoring the Soul of the World: Our Living Bond with Nature's Intelligence*, he points out with sagely clarity that when we are fully and selflessly attentive to experience - of ourselves, one another and nature - such deep perception is tantamount to self-rewardingly contemplative mindfulness (11). And Fideler brings us to the vision and the lived experience of "the mutual implication of each thing in everything else" (230). In this way, we come to experience that the universe giving forth life and mind in turn is shaped by life and mind; our life and environment are mutually enfolded (219). Our (r)evolutionary understanding of our common homecoming is restoring the soul of the world.

This kind of meditative holism, not unlike Pope Francis' ecological spirituality (par. 216), when constantly present to mind and embodied in our lived, shared experience goes beyond the exaggerated individuality of private gain and accords with both Francis' call to us in behalf

of a “contemplative” and “integral” ecology (par. 12, 246, 11), and, unexpectedly, with Bernie Sanders’ call for meaningful higher education for all. This is a call, as I will appropriate it, for education that indeed includes leading us out (*e-duco*) of our default habituations, mentality and routinely inattentive or distracted selves to being more alive in and with and as the large Earth community of interbeing. Socialism in this sense is better recognized today as EcoSocial conduct and mindfulness. It is education and social praxis for maturing beyond private and singular to whole, wholing, healing and holy notions of growth and welfare in a planetary community.

Helping us make this contemplative evolutionary reach – or homecoming, as the case may be --Fideler speaks of the “alchemy of engagement” (236) as a way of collaborating with nature, not just working on nature as we are used to trying. And a preeminent form of this consciousness and engagement is in learning to design our systems for flourishing sustainability and continual renewal and restoration by imitating and enacting or embodying the patterns of natural rhythm and structure -- what in Chinese traditions was natural, *ziran*, or self-organizingly “that which is of itself what it is” in some translations. Following Benyus, he names this Biomimicry whereby “humanity consciously enters into collaboration with nature” to create flourishingly - beneficial to all life - the means of obtaining food, disposing waste, generating power, etc. (239; see also Mare).

And where Bernie emphasizes free higher public education as a means to improving the common weal, we may add the idea that it would include practice in states and modes of contemplative and practical consciousness and coconsciousness that both accord with natural patterns and dynamics of cosmogenesis (as in ecovillage and permaculture design) and also,

thereby, allow closer and more intimate experiences of ourselves as the life of nature itself – and of the life of nature as one with our own. Here Fideler refers to Primack and Abrams who speak of the “need to experience the universe from the inside” as participants and co-creators.

Emphasizes Fideler on these bases and on the premise of ecological interdependence, humans, planet Earth and cosmos are not machines but a community, and we may also think here of Gregory Bateson speaking of “an ecology of mind” in narrating the story of this community. In the NeoConfucian tradition, as mentioned, the sage forms one body and heart/mind with Heaven and Earth in *tianrenheyi*, the harmony of humans and/as nature; and anyone was understood to be capable of being a sage. Fideler closes too with the idea that the collaboration with the patterns of nature by humans in “cosmopolis” and (co)evolving for future generations is already at the heart of the Western intellectual tradition. For nature was teacher and guide as much for the PreSocratic, Stoic and Hermetic philosophers as for the Alchemists – and in many respects for Asian and Indigenous sages and shamans. And he adverts to John Todd and the New Alchemists (248) regarding ecological design for the future as “a deliberate and consciously evolving partnership with the natural world.” Beyond sustainability is the flourishing regeneration of ourselves and our common home; (Chinese *sheng-sheng* or production and reproduction, a traditional sagelike attribute).

It is in contemplative, authentically selfless or sincere whole systems design initiatives, consciousness and conduct that we are, by this account, most likely fruitfully to bring together the values expressed by Bernie Sanders, Pope Francis, David Fideler and Thomas Berry in a living story of and - through us - by the universe for future generations innumerable. In becoming integrally diaphanous and transparent with the life of things, we perform the

numinosity and the ongoing emergent (r)evolutionary wholeness that is at once practical, holy and flourishing of body and mind and - in that it is not just a utilitarian project of private profit according to etiquettes of win and lose - just plain fun.

Endnotes and References

¹Relevant page numbers are given throughout in parentheses for books and authors mentioned or cited, e. g. (xxx) except in cases of Pope Francis' encyclical where the numbers in parentheses refer to the paragraph numbers of his text, e. g. (par. xxx)

N.B. senator Elizabeth Warren's book *This Fight is Our Fight* (2017) is a more recently published and vital complement to those discussed here; I look forward to engaging her ideas in later work.

² As of January 2017. Note: Think again of those eight men whose wealth was alleged to equal that of half the Earth's population (<http://www.economist.com/news/finance-and-economics/21715043-oxfams-headline-grabbing-comparison-has-some-flaws-are-eight-men-wealthy-half>).

³Keeping in mind the etymological connections between ethos and ethics: place-based, place-respecting custom and morality. See also <http://www.anthropocenemagazine.org/>

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